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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a model for training graduate students to teach, and reports the experiences and outcomes of an intitial application of the approach. The application took place with a large undergraduate class in introductory psychology with a professor in charge, assisted by five beginning graduate teaching assistants. The course met twice weekly, once as a large group for lecture by the professor, and once in small groups led by the teaching assistants. The assistants were given autonomy in determining the directions of their seminars, but were closely monitored. Most of the assistants lacked confidence in their teaching competencies and had difficulty asserting their authority. There was considerable competition among them for approval from the supervisor. It was difficult for them to cope with negative attitudes from their students, and they found it hard to evaluate them objectively. The following recommendations are made for improving such a training program: (1) clear definition of the roles for the teaching assistants in their sections; (2) increased training in the course's subject matter prior to assisting in it; (3) clear preview of what will take place in the supervision sessions; (4) a more active role for supervisors as they observe assistants' class performance; and (5) clear guidelines to teaching assistants regarding basic instructional procedures. (JD)

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A Clinical Supervision Model to Train Teaching Skills in Psychology*

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In many academic fields, teaching is likely to play a part, though not necessarily a very significant or highly regarded part, of one's professional career. In the past, at many research universities, teaching was the portion of one's job used to support research activities and constituted a very minor criterion used in selection or evaluation. With the tremendous increase in competition for academic positions in many academic specialties, the importance of having both teaching skills and research abilities is likely to grow, and many universities are increasingly demanding both. Unfortunately, little or no attention is typically given by our doctoral programs to adequately preparing graduate students for their roles as instructors.

Most graduate students serve as teaching assistants sometime during their graduate training. Indeed, since World War II, teaching assistants (TA's) have been heavily utilized in universities because of their availability as a cheap source of labor. Usually, TA's are hired for two purposes: to provide undergraduate instruction, and to supply a source of funding to trainees. Seldom is much attention systematically directed by programs to training, supervising, or even observing fledgling TA's as they learn to teach. It is as if graduate programs assume that their students are "born teachers," or, that there is no adequate way to train instructional competence,

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or, perhaps most likely, that teaching is so unrewarded and unimportant an endeavor that scarce and expensive training time should not be devoted to it. So, while most people would agree that college teaching is complex and hard to do well, TA's are expected to master it alone. To ask for help is often viewed as a sign of weakness indicative of serious deficiency, or as a bid for popularity with the supervisor (Goldsmid, 1976). Academics are thus one of the few professional groups that do not offer explicit training to aid their practitioners in working with one of their major client groups--students. Fortunately, undergraduates are by and large a tolerant lot, and are less expressive of complaints about the quality of instruction than they often have a right to be.

Graduate students' first teaching experiences typically encompass the least desirable aspects of instruction, such as grading massive numbers of papers and examinations, constructing tests, or monitoring attendance, all of which communicate that teaching offers little intellectual stimulation or opportunity for growth. Occasionally, teaching assistants are given complete responsibility for discussion sections or even for courses of their own. Regardless of their actual assignment, they are unlikely to receive much direct supervision. This state of affairs is not surprising, given that at many universities there are few rewards in terms of prestige, higher salaries, or reduced workloads for faculty who do take supervision of teaching assistants seriously and who spend the time necessary to instruct and evaluate beginning teachers.

In the few instances where systematic efforts have been made to train graduate students in teaching skills, usually in the form of brief orientations or periodic brown bag lunches, one of two basic approaches has been taken. The first is cognitive, emphasizing methods of organizing and presenting material, and ways of handling the more technical aspects of teaching such

as developing tests and grading papers. The second is affective, in which the emotional issues inherent in instructional roles are addressed (Mann, 1970). The cognitive approach is typically executed in a didactic manner, whereas the affective approach is taught primarily through direct experience, such as by T-groups or other intensive emotional experiences. The literature on the training of teaching assistants in teaching is meager and the research even less. Therefore, the basis for comparing these two approaches is very small so that there is scant reason to believe that either of these approaches, when used independently, is a very effective way of teaching beginning college teachers how to teach. Still, training programs in teaching regardless of their emphasis, provide better preparation for teaching than no program at all, which seems to be the introduction most commonly experienced by beginning graduate students.

Affective issues in the classroom are often overlooked by college teachers because they do not understand them, or if they do, they do not know what to do about them (Mann, 1970). Yet, these affective issues play an important role in teacher-student relationships and thus are critical to understanding the educational process. In successful teaching, the instructor is knowledgeable about the course content, skilled in its presentation and effective in managing the affects aroused in himself and his students and able to channel them to the service of the teaching-learning process. However, forces outside the classroom also affect the success of the teacher including the departmental or university context in which it occurs (Mann, 1970; Memo 21, 1967). Considering the nature and complexity of the components that seem to comprise successful teaching, it is no wonder that universities have not tried to teach prospective college teachers: it is not easy.

This paper presents a model for training graduate students how to teach, and reports the experiences and outcomes of an initial application of the

approach. This method attempts to address both cognitive and affective aspects of learning to teach by using an integrated supervision format. Drawing on clinical supervision models, this approach incorporates an emphasis on affective issues, individual supervision, live observation of the teaching assistant's class performance, and assumption by the supervisors of responsibility for the quality of teaching provided to the undergraduate students in the course. This multimodal approach offers intensive supervision to students while simultaneously giving them considerable autonomy in the design and execution of their individual sections. The problems generated by this approach and recommendations for its future use are also discussed.

The application of this model took place with a large undergraduate class in an introductory specialty area of psychology in which the senior author was the professor in charge. He was assisted by five graduate teaching assistants, all of whom were beginners. This one term course met twice weekly for one and a half hours, once as a large group for lecture by the professor, and once in small group sections for lecture, discussion, and exercises led by the teaching assistants. Students were assigned to the various sections on the basis of their preferences, which were obtained following a brief description of each section by its respective teaching assistant. The format of large group lecture and small group discussion sections was similar to that employed in many introductory courses that make heavy use of teaching assistants.

This use of autonomous sections, each led by a teaching assistant who assumed primary responsibility for the section was an important feature of our design. The teaching assistants were given complete freedom in determining the directions of their seminars with no restrictions placed on the content to be covered, the methods of teaching to be employed, or the means for evaluating the performance of the students. Such autonomy allowed the graduate

students to capitalize on their own areas of expertise, both in content and in presentation style. This distinguished the program from many TA assignments in which the student is provided with a preselected text, a common course syllabus, and standardized procedures for assessing student performance. While this approach offered the teaching assistants a sense of ownership for their sections, it also involved a heavy responsibility, for which some were not yet prepared.

This autonomy was not unlimited however. Trainees were actually experiencing a "supervised autonomy," since whatever teaching activities they chose were closely monitored. Each graduate student was given considerable supervision throughout the semester, both individually and in a small group. The five teaching assistants met weekly for one and a half hours as a group with the two teaching supervisors (i.e., the authors). This group was intended to focus on the day-to-day aspects of instruction, such as preparing examinations and organizing class activities (the cognitive components of teaching), and on the feelings experienced by the teaching assistants in the course of conducting their sections (the affective components of teaching). In addition, all the graduate students were observed live in their class performance by the supervisors, initially as a pair and later individually. These observations were made for each teaching assistant approximately every three weeks, and were followed by individualized feedback after the class. This was supplemented by occasional review of audio tape recordings made of the section meetings. As in the group supervision, both content and process issues involved in teaching were addressed. Each of these supervisory modalities offered distinct contributions. For example, the group supervision allowed the sharing of common as well as unique problems and concerns and emotional reactions in a supportive setting. The observation of actual teaching performance by the supervisors provided "real" (rather than recollected data)

and tape recordings allowed teaching assistants to review and critique their own behavior.

This model of training was complicated, and several problems emerged in its application, some of which were inherent but others were not, surfacing unexpectedly. These difficulties included: the fact that one of the supervisors not only served as the principal instructor in the course, but also as a faculty member in the TA's graduate program, and therefore, had responsibility for assessing their performance in teaching as well as in other areas; the tendency for the teaching assistants to identify closely with their students who, in turn, were more likely to identify with their teaching assistant than the course professor; the frequent occurrence of disagreements within the supervision group regarding when and how often to discuss content issues, and when, and how often, to discuss process material. Additionally, the teaching culture of the teaching assistants did not facilitate their participation in this training since it socialized them to believe that they did not need much supervision in teaching. The department also placed strain on this program because its academic atmosphere, while not overtly hostile to instructional efforts, certainly did not evaluate them highly or provide any rewards to either the trainees or the supervisors for doing this effort well.

One of the most difficult aspects of applying this model was training the teaching assistants to recognize, learn from, and be responsive to, their own emotional reactions in teaching. Some graduate students felt uncomfortable discussing these issues, reacting by ignoring them, or by trying to fill the time with questions about course content or instructional procedures, or other "safe" topics. This was particularly characteristic, not surprisingly, of those who might have benefitted most from such exploration. The attention given to affective issues was viewed by some teaching assistants

as being "too clinical" or "too similar to a T-group." In addition, some students found the switch back and forth from content to process to be confusing, and preferred a focus on one or the other. Similarly, some preferred to keep the sources of content and process information separate, rather than receiving both from one person. The focus on affective issues was clearly unfamiliar to most and therefore, threatening.

Several affective themes emerged with regularity throughout the term. First, most of the teaching assistants lacked confidence in their competencies as teachers. Two had never even taken a course in the subject matter and consequently, were appropriately concerned about mastering the course content. While they all had had some prior involvement in teaching, these experiences consisted mainly of leading discussions and grading papers or exams. However, other technical matters were new to them, such as lecturing and constructing tests. None had ever shouldered complete responsibility for a section or course, and while this was an attractive prospect for them, it was also a frightening one. Students' feelings of inadequacy were reflected in their behavior throughout the semester, e.g., difficulty asserting their role of authority in the class. Second, the teaching assistants expressed a great deal of ambivalence about sharing their concerns and their shortcomings with their peers in the supervisory meetings. They were not well acquainted with each other and wanted to present a positive image to each other. Since they all were students in the same graduate program and they were being supervised in teaching by one of their program's professors, there was considerable competition among them. These conditions contributed to their difficulties in sharing personally meaningful information. One consequence was that group cohesion was slow to develop. As students got to know each other and the supervisors, and as they began to feel more comfortable with teaching, the atmosphere of the group relaxed, students became more

supportive of each other, and group cohesiveness increased. Third, most teaching assistants found it hard to effectively handle students who were confronting or challenging, those who attempted to test their reactions, or those who openly ventilated their hostilities toward the teaching assistant, the professor, the course, teachers, or life in general. These undergraduates intimidated the teaching assistants and weakened their fragile sense of competence in teaching, since this negativism tended to be personalized. For some teaching assistants, it was more important to be accepted and well liked by their students than to be an effective teacher. Those assistants who tried hardest to win student acceptance similarly tried hard to win supervisor acceptance. Fourth, many teaching assistants detested evaluating student performance. Making assignments and grading papers and tests were viewed as necessary evils at best. Since the undergraduates, in many cases, were not significantly younger than the graduate students, nor much less advanced in their knowledge of the course content, the teaching assistants identified too strongly with their students. For example, some graduate students felt grading was subjective and arbitrary, and therefore, unimportant. Feelings against grading were acted upon in various ways depending on the TA's defensive styles, but included: writing extremely easy test questions, assigning high grades to most students, avoiding taking attendance, and attempting to place all the responsibility for student evaluation onto the supervisors. A related issue was their reluctance to set limits with their students, e.g., around assignment deadlines, or lateness to class. These various activities concerning student appraisal highlighted the teaching assistants' positions of authority, toward which most felt ambivalent. Emotional themes, such as those just described, were difficult for teaching assistants to examine in much detail.

Since this implementation of the model of training teachers was designed

as a pilot project, it was not experimentally compared with other methods of training graduate students to teach. We sought experience in implementing the model so that it could be modified before being subjected to more rigorous scrutiny. Such comparisons would be difficult to conduct in any event because of the scarcity of teaching assistant training programs, and because of the many design complications, including differing subject matter, skills and interests of the trainees, and attitudes toward teaching on the part of various departments.

We did attempt to evaluate the program's effectiveness as best we could, however. The teaching assistants' own assessments of their training were obtained. At the completion of the course, each was asked to anonymously fill out a survey questionnaire on the experience. In addition, we evaluated the quality of teaching provided by the graduate students over the term based on live observations of classroom performance and tape recordings of their classes. Also, the teaching assistants administered mid-term and final course evaluations to their sections.

The teaching assistants' responses to the questionnaire yielded some interesting findings. Among the five trainees, only one reported having a serious interest in teaching at the beginning of the course. This student's view of teaching, the person acknowledged, was very romantic and idealistic, changing to a less positive but more realistic view at the end of the semester. The other students' interest in teaching was low at the outset and remained at this level throughout. As already noted, the TA's came to the course with limited prior background in teaching. Those instructional activities that were most unfamiliar to the TA's were planning a course, lecturing, and constructing tests. These deficiencies were compounded for some students whose knowledge of the course subject matter was extremely limited even though it was their major area of study. Not surprisingly, these students

felt their backgrounds were inadequate for teaching this course, whereas those with some background in the subject felt adequately prepared. Regardless of their knowledge of the course material or their experience in teaching, the assistants were concerned about their ability to convey the course content.

Regarding specific aspects of the supervision provided, the group supervision received mixed evaluations. There was confusion about the primary purpose of the group (lecture, seminar, T-group, or problem-solving). This lack of clarity was unsettling since they were unsure of how to behave and what to discuss. Most indicated that the problem solving activity in the group was helpful although some felt that the affective issues were overemphasized and cognitive issues underemphasized. A related concern was their feeling under pressure to focus more on their problems than on their successes in teaching. TA's wanted to spend more time discussing the specifics of a problem until some solution could be reached, rather than getting general guidance and then solving the specific problem on their own. Live observation of their class behavior was considered beneficial, but more so when the observers attended their sessions individually, and stayed throughout the entire class period. Several thought that participation in the class rather than taking a passive role would have helped more. Analagous to the group meetings, individual feedback sessions were viewed as helpful, although critized for their lack of attention to specific suggestions for improvement or solutions to the problems identified. Most resisted using recording devices in their classes, claiming it required a great deal of effort and was not very useful. The idea of taping was introduced after the semester started and while all the students were trained to use both audio and video taping equipment, few actually taped their classes. Had this issue been presented at the beginning of the training and its use strongly encouraged

or even required, such resistance to it might have been lessened.

The teaching assistants began this training with a variety of needs which they hoped would be met and most felt that these had been satisfied. At the end of this experience when they identified areas in which they needed to improve, they were remarkably accurate in their assessments, for them a significant accomplishment. All reported they would repeat this training experience if given the chance, and all planned to obtain further teaching experience before they graduated.

Over the course of the semester, the supervisors made approximately five live observations of each teaching assistant during his conduct of section meetings. The observations were experienced by some of the TA's as being disruptive, and as making their behavior and that of their students guarded. It was difficult for most to ignore the presence of the observer. Each graduate student had different issues around teaching to deal with as evidenced in his classroom behavior. Some were too structured in their approaches and therefore, did not respond well to the particular concerns of their students. Others were too unstructured, even when structure would have been appropriate. When given feedback by the supervisors or by their students, it was sometimes difficult for them to change their behavior accordingly, especially if they were feeling anxious. Many of the undergraduates tried to saddle the teaching assistants with responsibility for their learning e.g., demanding reviews of the weekly lecture or insisting on review sessions before the examinations, and the teaching assistants often accepted this responsibility, at times much too willingly. All the graduate students were successful in establishing rapport with their classes although their methods for doing so varied. Two significant issues emerged that needed attention by all the graduate students. These were: conflict between their personal needs and the needs of their students and the supervision group as a whole,

and difficulties in integrating theory presented in class and in readings with their section's activities. Interestingly, one is a content issue and the other is an affective issue.

From this experience, we have recommendations for revision of the model and its format, the most important of which will be presented.

(1) First, we recommend increased structure in defining the roles for the teaching asssistants in their sections, while still giving them some degree of autonomy in how they are achieved. Although some autonomy appears to be essential for teachers to be effective, many beginning teaching assistants need some structure to assure that their students receive a high quality learning experience, and that there is reasonable consistency among the sections.

(2) Intensive training in the subject matter of the course prior to assisting in it. Students find it difficult to learn their subject matter and how to teach at the same time.

(3) A clear preview about what will take place in the supervision sessions needs to be provided. By preparing the trainees for the dual focus on content and process issues in teaching, it is hoped that they could improve the use of the supervision time. The term "clinical model" should be avoided since it arouses considerable anxiety in beginning graduate students, who fear, however inappropriately, that their personalities will be analyzed or their foibles revealed.

(4) A more active role for the supervisors as they observe students' class performance would often be desirable. By participating in the class, supervisors could model effective teaching strategies. An active involvement might also be less threatening to both the teaching assistants and their students. Less frequent observation would probably also be appropriate.

(5) Clear guidelines should be provided to teaching assistants regarding

basic instructional procedures including test construction, methods and criteria for grading, and planning class activities. If graduate students feel comfortable in the basic mechanics of teaching, they might be able to devote more attention to the affective issues involved in teaching.

At the present time, this model of training graduate students to teach is in its early stages of development. It shows promise as a format for educating students about the cognitive and affective issues in teaching. While the model is not tied to any particular discipline, supervisors in some fields may need training themselves in order to become knowledgeable and comfortable with the emotional aspects of teaching. Ideally, the supervisors of teaching assistants would attend to both the cognitive and affective components of teaching in their efforts to train these students and such behaviors would then be modelled by the graduate students in the conduct of their classes.

Such training is not easy or cheap, but if we care at all about teaching psychology, we ought to be helping our beginning professionals learn something about it.

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